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ABSTRACT

Noting that understanding the process of transition, identifying the appropriate tools, and developing strategies are key elements to facilitate smooth transitions through early childhood, this booklet is designed to assist educators in this transition process. The booklet discusses how transitions to new programs create both challenges and new opportunities for growth in young children and their families, and describes how planning can facilitate smooth transitions. The book also delineates the partners in the transition process, including children and their families, program staff and administrators, and other community agencies. Four basic elements of transition planning are presented: (1) age appropriateness; (2) individual appropriateness; (3) child initiated and child directed; and (4) teacher supported. Ways in which programs may differ are also listed. The booklet also presents a step-by-step process for effective community transition planning. The need for additional planning for children with special needs is discussed. Recommendations for enhancing communication among early childhood personnel and information sharing strategies are presented. Suggested activities to create continuity for the child are also listed. The booklet concludes with a list of 16 recommended readings and a list of books to prepare children for transition. (KB)

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Iowa Department of Education

Taking the Next Steps Together

Transition for Children Birth Through Age Eight in Iowa

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What is transition all about? It is adjusting to significant change in the routine. As adults, we adjust to changes routinely on a daily basis. For children, changes can be more traumatic. Take a moment out of your busy day and think about the transitions you have encountered in your lifetime.

✦ *Remember your transition from a modest 2-wheeled form of transportation to a tire-squealing, 4-wheel mode?*

✦ *Remember the changes required when you first heard the words, "You're hired"?*

✦ *Remember your first day of school?*

This publication is designed to help facilitate smooth transitions throughout early childhood by reducing the fear and demonstrating that change can be good. Understanding the process, identifying the tools and developing strategies are the key elements needed to tackle this transition successfully. This booklet is designed to provide you with those elements.

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Early Childhood Transition in Iowa Schools

Young children must adjust to many changes. Some of the transitions experienced by children birth through age eight are major milestones for both children and their families.

Some changes that may accompany transitions - such as an earlier meal time or elimination of a nap - have little long-term significance for a child or family. But others, such as instability in child care arrangements or marked shifts in adult expectations at home or at school, may influence a young child's sense of security and long-term attitudes toward learning.

As with many other changes, transition to a new program creates both challenges and new opportunities for growth. Conquering the challenges can give children and families additional confidence to meet future transitions. Too much change, however, can create stress, anxiety, fear or confusion, and it can hinder young children's ability to learn.

The **goal in a smooth transition is to create as much continuity as possible** for all children entering new programs in the community or school. Research has shown that:

- Whenever young children **can experience success** during significant transitions they grow in confidence and competence to manage later moves.
- **Local planning** by responsible teachers, families, and representatives from other community agencies can minimize discontinuity and enhance children's opportunities for success.
- **Developmentally appropriate curricula** provide continuity and promote early success for children with a diversity of abilities and previous experiences.
- Family members often contribute significantly to young children's adjustments to a new environment. To be comfortable participants, parents **need information and encouragement.** Their culture and goals for their children and families must be valued.
- **Families who feel welcome** are likely to continue active involvement in their children's education.

Transition Feels Like. . .

Your First Airplane Flight: It's exciting, but also scary!

***Going Upstairs*:** You take one step at a time.

Trying a New Recipe: You hope that all the ingredients will add up to a good taste.

A Bridge: It's a crossing between two places of security.

A Vacation: Planning helps prevent mishaps.

Playing Cards: It's more fun to do it with friends.

Diving Off a Cliff: It's a step into the unknown.

Your First Date: You don't want to look foolish.

A Sandwich: The significant stuff is wedged between the bread of everyday routines.

A Marriage: It happens on one day but requires a lot of effort both before and after.

A Rainbow: A hopeful new beginning.

- **Planned activities** can help children and families cope with necessary changes and negotiate transitions successfully.
- Written procedures and timelines help communities to ensure that transition activities occur on schedule.

Transition planning helps to assure that the special needs of children and families are met, necessary information about children's special learning characteristics is shared and special equipment and training are provided in a timely manner. Good beginnings help to minimize or avert later problems, such as academic failure, school dropout and antisocial actions. When teachers, families and representatives of community agencies plan together, the transition process works better than when the responsible parties do not communicate and/or cooperate. Planning can help children and their families reduce anxiety about transition and, instead, anticipate the exciting opportunities of the school years.

Community-wide planning for transition to kindergarten has been encouraged by the federal government under the National Education Goals, as a part of site-based planning in the state's school restructuring, and by a myriad of position statements from professional organizations. Transition planning is consistent with the Early Childhood Vision and The Primary Program developed by the Iowa Department of Education. Both documents support the concept that children's development is a shared responsibility of families, schools and other agencies in the community.

Recognizing The Partners

Who's Involved in Transition?

Transition is about children and their families moving between programs. Any child or parent may appear confident about moving on or concerned about real or imagined risks. Many parents have questions about what will be expected of their child in the new setting. In addition to the normal adjustments of beginning a new program, many children have special needs to be met in transitioning.

Transition is about teachers, support staff and care providers supporting children and their families during the move between programs. The annual process of sending children on and then receiving new children challenges adults who work with them. Planning helps adults to share questions and information with each other to ease each child's transition. Cooperative transition planning among responsible teachers, support staff and care providers also helps them build programs that create continuity for children and their families.

Transition is about administrators of programs and community service agencies who are responsible for initiating the community's plan for transition. Administrators can set policies and practices to improve transitions. When they work together, agency administrators can provide information and services families need to support their children. Joint efforts can reduce miscommunication when the doors open.

Partners in the Transition Process

Children birth through age eight

Parents, guardians, grandparents and family members

Program staff and administrators of:

In Home Services
Title 1
Even Start
Private Preschool
Day Care Provider
Child Care Center
Public Sponsored Preschool
Early Childhood Special Education
Family and Group Day Care Home
Home School
Private School
Parochial School
Head Start
Kindergarten
Special Education Services
School-based Child Care
Area Education Agencies
Early Intervention Services

Other Community Agencies, such as:

Community Recreation
Library Services
ISU Extension Service
Mental Health Service
Church Programs
Community Health Services
Community Action Agencies
Family Resource Centers
Child Care Resource & Referral
Department of Human Services
School Based Youth Services
Prekindergarten through third grade

Taking the Next Steps Together

The Heart of Transition Planning

The heart of transition planning is a shared philosophy based on how young children grow and learn. All programs of care and education for children from birth to age eight should be developmentally appropriate. There are four basic elements that must be addressed and intentionally included in any early childhood program in order to meet the needs of young children:

Age Appropriateness

Developmentally appropriate programs provide a learning environment and appropriate experiences based on knowledge of typical development of children within the age span served. Research indicates in the first nine years, children develop and progress through universal stages and predictable sequences of growth and change. Children can progress within a range of plus or minus two years of chronological age and be considered "typically developing."

Individual Appropriateness

Each child is a unique person. Children who are developing typically move through universal stages at their own individual patterns, rates, and style of growth. Children with unique needs and abilities will be offered experiences and environments that match their developmental abilities. Developmentally appropriate programs are responsive to and honor a child's individual uniqueness and differences such as personality, learning style, ways of intelligence, family background, and cultural heritage.

Child Initiated and Child Directed

Child initiated means children have control and choice in carrying out an activity but within a framework provided by a teacher. A child needs to be purposefully engaged in an activity, exploring materials with interest and curiosity, trying out ideas and involving themselves in their environment. Children are allowed to select materials or projects themselves, determine how they will interact with given materials, and decide how they will approach and solve a problem.

Teacher Supported

Teacher supported means creating an intentional and planned framework for learning and providing materials and activities consistent with what we know about child development. Teachers ask open-ended questions that encourage inquiry, thought, discussion and reflection by the child rather than expecting simple "right" answers. The teacher responds to the needs, strengths, requests and ideas of the children so they can grow and explore. Teachers become a resource and a facilitator to children to help them "learn how to learn" rather than being the source and giver of information and knowledge.

WAYS THAT PROGRAMS MAY DIFFER

- ◇ Adult/child ratio
- ◇ Amount of teacher attention and individual assistance
- ◇ Number of children in groups, class and school
- ◇ Philosophies of instruction and behavioral guidance
- ◇ Curriculum content
- ◇ Appropriate activities
- ◇ Transportation arrangements
- ◇ Nature and degree of family involvement
- ◇ Nature of teacher's guidance or directions
- ◇ Expectations for independent play and work
- ◇ Expected knowledge of health and safety rules
- ◇ Daily routines
- ◇ Expectations for managing materials and clothing
- ◇ Expected skills with equipment
- ◇ Playground activities
- ◇ Sponsorship and regulations
- ◇ Education and experience of providers
- ◇ Length of activities
- ◇ Comprehensiveness of program
- ◇ Length of days

Elements Of Effective Transitions

Key partners should be involved in the transition planning process. Broad participation in planning will result in transition practices that are appropriate. The accompanying nine-step diagram outlines the process of community transition planning.

1. All adults who are responsible for children's care and education share in developing a written transition plan for the community which includes ongoing communication and collaboration.

2. Transition plans seek to involve families in decision-making and support them in active participation in their children's care and education.

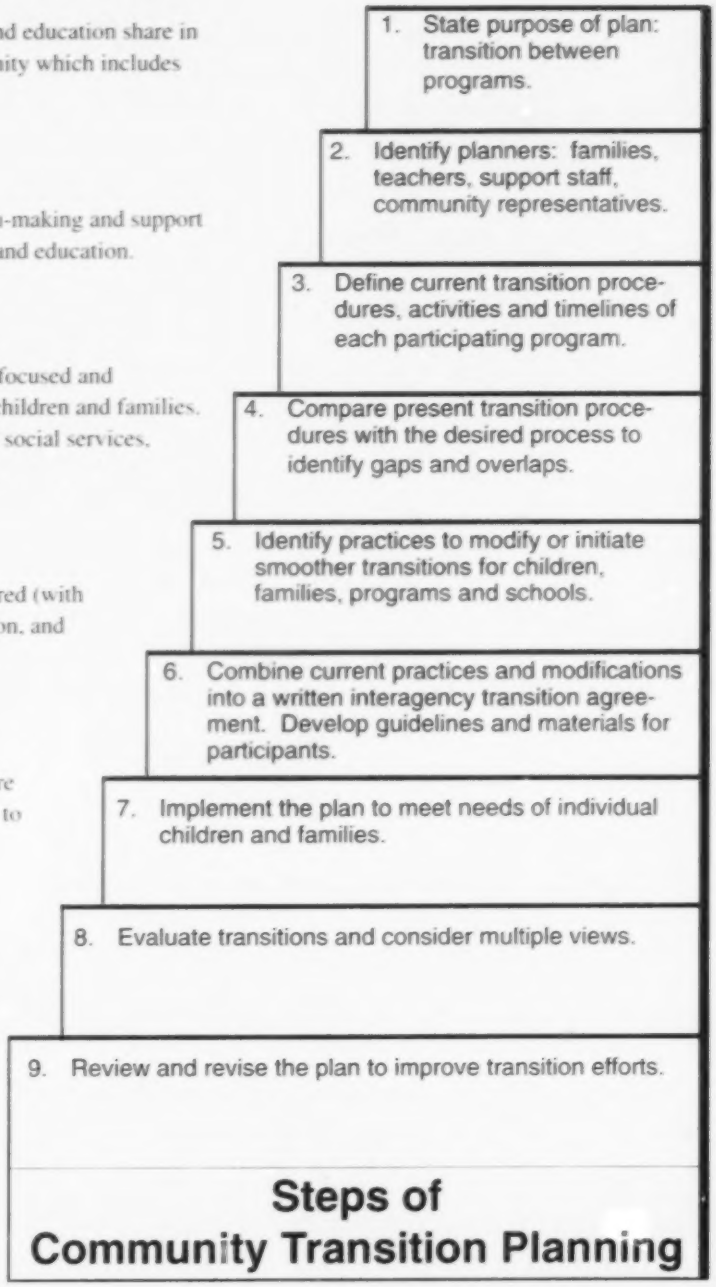
3. A continuum of comprehensive, integrated, family-focused and community-based services are provided for young children and families. These will include, but not be limited to, health and social services, nutrition, transportation and adult basic education.

4. Information to support a child's development is shared (with parent permission) across home, child care, education, and health care settings.

5. Efforts to help children feel secure across settings are bolstered by effective practices, which are sensitive to individual, language, and cultural differences.

6. A systematic approach to joint staff development is designed and implemented with administrative support, resulting in shared curriculum and instruction planning.

7. Transition procedures are written and then followed. Transition outcomes are shared and used to improve, refine and expand approaches.


1. State purpose of plan: transition between programs.
2. Identify planners: families, teachers, support staff, community representatives.
3. Define current transition procedures, activities and timelines of each participating program.
4. Compare present transition procedures with the desired process to identify gaps and overlaps.
5. Identify practices to modify or initiate smoother transitions for children, families, programs and schools.
6. Combine current practices and modifications into a written interagency transition agreement. Develop guidelines and materials for participants.
7. Implement the plan to meet needs of individual children and families.
8. Evaluate transitions and consider multiple views.
9. Review and revise the plan to improve transition efforts.
Steps of Community Transition Planning

Consideration of Children with Special Needs

Additional planning will be needed for children with special needs. Planning teams should consider these questions:

1. What educational and/or Individualized Family Service Plan/Individualized Education Plan (IFSP/IEP) objectives should be written to help prepare the child for the next learning environment?

2. What additional evaluation, if any, is needed?
3. What information from the present program can be used to determine eligibility for special services?
4. If a categorical label is to be written on the IFSP/IEP, what will it be?
5. How and when will the placement decision be made?
6. What equipment needs to be obtained for use at the new program?
7. What staff development is needed to accommodate the child's special needs?
8. What accommodations and adaptations for physical needs and environment need to be made?
9. . there an Individual IDEA Section 504 plan for this child?
10. How will information be shared among all team members? Are all required releases of information in writing and current?
11. Is a program visit planned and scheduled?
12. Is there an annual review or comprehensive evaluation scheduled for the child this year?

The transition process for a child with special needs should be explained to families both verbally and in writing early in the year and should occur in a timely manner. This is best accomplished through a parent meeting. Parents of children receiving special education need to know their child will be moving to another level of service. Families have the right to be involved in the whole process. They need to be made aware of their right to have another individual (friend, relative, advocate) with them at transition meetings.

Accomplishing successful transition and inclusion for some children with special needs may require additional staff development for receiving staff. This will require ongoing consultation between special education and general education personnel.

Professional Development and Communication

In effective transition, providers/teachers and families work together to plan and carry out activities to support children during movement from one location to another. A variety of transition activities have been found useful. Early childhood personnel who have visited each other's programs know how to incorporate symbols of continuity for children. For example, rereading a favorite preschool book during the first week of kindergarten or teaching a special kindergarten song to Head Start children help 5-year-olds to feel secure during transition.

Professional development on most topics is relevant across classrooms, disciplines and programs. Joint staff development promotes continuity in services, builds relationships to aid problem solving, increases respect for one another's roles in transition and helps to define the transition activities. Professional development needs to focus on current research of developmentally appropriate practices for young children. Topics that would address how children grow and learn should include brain research, multiple intelligences, learning styles, integrating curriculum, etc.

Some recommendations for Iowa communities to increase communication among early childhood personnel include:

- Schedule regular meetings and sharing sessions.
- Make cross program visitations.
- Learn new skills together.
- Study and discuss policy statements and new publications.
- Attend early childhood conferences and inservices together.
- Urge the educational service center (i.e. AEAs, Head Start) to sponsor training that brings together early childhood personnel.
- Visit classrooms in nearby areas that are continually working towards being developmentally appropriate and inclusive.
- Review the policies on confidentiality between agencies and develop an appropriate way to share information.
- Work together with a consultant to develop a local philosophy and curriculum that provides continuity for young children and success for all.
- Work together to support and assist each other.
- Celebrate accomplishments together.
- Evaluate and share information.

Information Sharing

Specific strategies for sharing information about children among sending and receiving teachers and family members are defined within the community's transition plan. One adult's parental or professional observations about a child can be very useful to other adults in understanding the child's interests and learning style.

- Parents must give written consent for information to be shared across programs.
- Communication can be oral, written and via videotapes.
- Records should be sent to the program prior to the child's entrance.
- Continuous communication among personnel is encouraged.

Did you know. . . .

New scientific research shows:

- Brain development before age one is more rapid and extensive than previously realized.
- Brain development is much more vulnerable to environmental influence than suspected.
- The environment affects the number of brain cells, connections among them and the way connections are wired.
- The influence of early environment on brain development is long-lasting.
- Early stress has a negative impact on brain function.

Source: Carnegie Corp. of New York

Suggested Activities to Create Continuity for the Child:

1. Hold parent meeting to introduce staff, give overview of program, (i.e. show video of children on a typical day), get signed releases, and explain program procedures and program policies (i.e. regarding illness).
2. Invite parent(s) and child to visit new site (tour facility, bring supplies, meet other children and staff).
3. Provide a breakfast for small groups of children with the principal or director (at school, child care center, Head Start, etc.)
4. Send a personal note to each student prior to the beginning of program/school.
5. Make a home visit prior to children entering the new program.
6. Design IEP objectives to help the child with special needs feel confident in the new surroundings.
7. Share pertinent information about the child between programs (i.e. strengths and needs, cultural issues).
8. Share records and portfolio information.
9. Provide "parent mentors" (experienced parents) to help welcome new families to the program.
10. Provide trial bus rides where parent(s) may accompany their child.
11. Provide parent(s) with an orientation booklet about program.
12. Form a curriculum study group open to interested teachers and parents to explore ways to promote continuity in teaching approaches and materials.
13. Identify special songs, games, books or class activities to be used in both programs.
14. Provide tips for parent(s) on supporting their child's learning and subsequent entrance to school.
15. Collaborate with health professionals to ensure that entering children have necessary health checks and immunizations.
16. Assign buddies to new students.
17. Provide family with an information form they can fill out to acquaint teachers with their child (see examples Helpful Information From Families).

Helpful Information From Families

1. I would describe our child in this way:
2. I would describe our family in this way:
3. A typical day with our child includes:
4. Our child likes to do (or is good at) these things:
5. Our child needs help with (avoids):
6. Our family likes to do these things together:
7. Recent changes seen in our child at home:
8. Questions we have about our child:
9. Our child does best when:
10. When our child wants something, she/he lets us know by:
11. Our child is interested in:
12. We would like our child to learn or get better at:
13. To help our child, we would like to help with:
14. Other things we'd like you to know about our child are: (i.e. health concerns, allergies, etc.)

— Adapted from Project Dakota

High Return on Investment

High/Scope researchers concluded the preschool programs are a cost effective public investment. It was found that the average cost of preschool care was $12,356 per child.

On the other hand, program participants returned $88,433 per participant to society in savings in educational and social services and in higher taxes paid. Thus, supporting preschools yielded taxpayers a return on investment of $7.16 for every tax dollar spent.

Recommended Readings

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"Build connections among parents, preschools and elementary schools to ensure smooth and coherent transitions. Systematic transition activities will promote instruction that is appropriate for the ages and personal characteristics of entering students, help parents and children understand and shape school expectations and inform teachers about each child. Home visits and other contacts between school staff and families, transfer of records, joint training and curriculum development by preschool and primary school staff and the coordinated delivery of support services are examples of transition activities."

Books to Prepare Children for Transition

AUTHOR	TITLE
Alexander	Sabrina
Allard	Miss Nelson Is Missing!
Anderson	Carlos Goes to School
Arnold	Where Do You Go to School?
Barkin	I'd Rather Stay Home
Barkin	Sometimes I Hate School
Behrens	What I Hear in My School
Berenstain	The Berenstain Bears Go to School
Boyd	I Met a Polar Bear
Bram	I Don't Want to Go to School
Breinburg	Shawn Goes to School
Buchmeier	I Know a Teacher
Burningham	The School
Calmenson	The Kindergarten Book
Cassidy	We Like Kindergarten
Caudill	A Pocketful of Cricket
Charles	Calico Cat at School
Cohen	The New Teacher
Cohen	No Good in Art
Cohen	When Will I Read
Cohen	See You Tomorrow, Charles
Cohen	Will I Have a Friend?
Cohen	First Grade Takes a Test
Cole	What's Good for a Five-Year-Old?
Delton	The New Girl at School
Elliott	Grover Goes to School
Frandsen	I Started School Today
Gordon	Crystal Is the New Girl
Haas	A Special Place for Johnny
Hamilton-Meritt	My First Days of School
Harris	The School Mouse
Hillert	Who Goes to School?
Hoffman	Steffie and Me
Holland	First Day of School
Horvath	Will the Real Tommy Wilson Please Stand Up
Hurd	Come with Me to Nursery School
Isadora	Willaby
Jones	Going to Kindergarten
Lenski	Debbie Goes to Nursery School
Lexau	I Hate Red Rover
Lystad	Jennifer Takes Over P.S. 94
Mann	The 25 Cent Friend
Marino	Where Are the Mothers?
Marshall	Fox at School
Marshall	Miss Nelson Is Back
Madson	I Go to School
Matthias	Out the Door
McInnes	Goodnight Painted Pony
Meshover	The Monkey that Went to School
Nichols	Big Paul's School Bus
Oppenheim	Mrs. Peloski's Snake
Ormsby	Twenty One Children
Oxenbury	First Day of School
Parish	Jumper Goes to School
Quackenbush	First Grade Jitters
Relf	The First Day of School
Relf	Show and Tell
Rockwell	My Nursery School
Rogers	Mr. Rogers Talks About...
Schick	The Little School at Cottonwood Corners
Schwartz	Bea and Mr. Jones
Simon	I'm Busy Too
Stein	A Child Goes to School
Steiner	I'd Rather Stay With You
Steptoe	Jeffrey Bear Cleans Up His Act
Thwaite	The Chatterbox
Tobias	The Dawdlewalk
Udry	What Mary Jo Shared
Welbar	Goodbye, Hello
Wells	Timothy Goes to School
Wisema	Morris Goes to School
Wittman	The Wonderful Mrs. Trumbly
Wolde	Betsy's First Day at Nursery School
Wolf	Adam Smith Goes to School
Wooley	Gus Was a Real Dumb Ghost

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Taking the Next Steps Together

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